



Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing

Defending the Rights of Vulnerable Children and Youth through Education: A Focus on the Role of Self-Teaching in Play

June 28, 2017

1:30 – 3:00 PM

2255 Rayburn House Office Building

Opening Remarks as prepared for delivery

Good afternoon and welcome to the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission's hearing on how global innovation and technology are strengthening the rights of children and youth through education. Our witnesses today have traveled from Illinois, Massachusetts, New York and Toronto. I would like to thank them very much for coming here to share their expertise with us.

The work of human rights is at times discouraging because we seek to shine a spotlight on mass violations taking place around the world, but today our desire is to highlight some of the most positive and important developments in the field. In the midst of deprivation and oppression, there are organizations implementing revolutionary ideas that are strengthening the rights of millions of youth around the globe whose lives are besieged by repression, war and poverty.

Of those affected by human rights abuses, children are often the world's most vulnerable demographic. They comprise more than 50 percent of the world refugee population. UNICEF maintains that deprivation of education fuels cycles of inequality that undermines the potential of individuals and societies. Humanitarian emergencies and protracted crises currently disrupt the education of over 75 million children in 35 crisis-affected countries.

In these countries, over 17 million school-aged children are refugees, approximately half of which attend primary school and less than a quarter of which attend secondary school. Girls in crisis-affected countries suffer disproportionately, as they are 2.5 times more likely to be out of school than boys.

Global technology companies, NGOs and individual entrepreneurs are developing original, creative solutions that are responding to children and youth in these crisis-affected areas by empowering communities to teach the fundamentals of development such as sharing, collaboration, and inquiry. Innovative ideas allow people within these contexts to access the knowledge needed to foster holistic development strategies and to advocate for their own needs and rights.

The United States is often involved in these efforts by identifying private sector entities to implement aid through grants, and also by establishing public-private partnerships that are characterized by joint planning and resource contributions. The United States must continue to utilize these partnerships, along with cutting edge technology, to strengthen the rights of vulnerable populations.

Today, we have invited a distinguished company of experts who are working directly at the intersection of human rights and innovative education strategies for youth.

I look forward to hearing how these strategies are providing solutions to some of the world's most intractable problems, and how United States policy can best strengthen these kinds of efforts.

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